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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MASERU 000460

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
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DEPARTMENT ALSO FOR AF/S;
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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [ASEC](#) [PINS](#) [KMCA](#) [LT](#)
SUBJECT: LESOTHO: ALLEGED COUP PLOTTERS FACE HARASSMENT IN LESOTHO
AND SOUTH AFRICA

REF: A) MASERU 452; B) MASERU 439; C) MASERU 436

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[11](#). (SBU) SUMMARY: On July 31, the Lesotho Defense Forces (LDF) redetained two soldiers charged with high treason immediately upon their release on bail from Maseru's "Maximum Central Prison." Meanwhile, local media and opposition political leaders claim that South African National Defense Force (SANDF) soldiers assaulted three of six men accused by the GOL of coup plotting (ref A) before the South African Police Service (SAPS) arrested them. On a related note, an influential local newspaper has come out against opposition demands to suspend Millennium Challenge Corporation assistance to Lesotho. END SUMMARY.

The Release-Arrest Loop

[12](#). (U) On July 31, heavily armed LDF Military Police (MPs) surrounded the Maseru "Maximum Central Prison" prior to the release of two LDF members who had posted bail after being charged with high treason. The MPs apprehended the two soldiers, Captain Lehloa Ramots'o and Corporal Paul Majalle, immediately after their departure from the prison. The military authorities quickly bundled the two soldiers into waiting army trucks while family and friends, who had gathered to meet the two men, protested. The two men had posted bail of 5,000 Maluti (approximate \$715) with an additional 60,000 Maluti surety (approximately \$8,600) to secure their release. Major Ramabele Mokhantso, a third soldier charged with high treason, remained imprisoned as he was unable to post bail.

South Africa Gets Rough With Asylees?

[13](#). (SBU) Embassy contacts and the local media claim that on July

28 individuals in South African National Defense Force (SANDF) uniforms entered a residence near Johannesburg housing three of the six Lesotho nationals reportedly granted asylum by the South African government (ref A). According to these reports, these alleged SANDF personnel assaulted Motlomelo Motlomelo, Pakiso Semoli, and Khotso Lebakeng, demanding the location of the three other asylees. The military personnel reportedly left after South African Police Service (SAPS) officers arrived and took the men into custody citing a request from the GOL. (NOTE: Our contact at Lesotho's Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) stated that no extradition charges against the men were presented to the South African government, but direct information passed between the Lesotho and South African police organizations cannot be ruled out. END NOTE.)

14. (SBU) According to local media reports, the three Basotho men are currently in police custody in Sebokeng (Gauteng Province, South Africa), and are expected to appear in a Johannesburg magistrate court on August 14. The whereabouts of the other three Basotho men who fled to South Africa, Mokherane Tsatsanyane, Makotoko Lerotholi and Thabo Thantsi are unknown.

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On July 31, South African Deputy High Commissioner in Maseru told Poloff that he had not been officially informed of any of these alleged events, but he had no reason to doubt that they occurred.

Media Against Opposition

Call for MCC Suspension

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16. (U) In an unsigned editorial in the July 27 issue of Public Eye, the paper rebuked opposition leaders for a letter to the U.S. Embassy asking for a suspension of Millennium Challenge Corporation funding. According to the fiercely independent paper, "The ruling party and the opposition must desist from sabotaging each other's legitimate political activities. The opposition's move to call for a suspension of Millennium Challenge Corporation funding, for example, is not an appropriate political weapon. Actions like this can only hurt the ultimate beneficiaries, the country's poorest... Politicians must not forget that those same people whom they are hurting with their irresponsible or wishy-washy actions are the ones who put them where they are in the first place."

17. (SBU) While stating that the opposition supported the Millennium Challenge Corporation's support for Lesotho, Alliance of Congress Parties Deputy Leader Dr. Ralitapole told Poloff on July 31 that the opposition's main concern was its perception that jobs created by MCC projects, especially in rural areas, would be doled out according to governing political party patronage networks without the knowledge of MCC. She also reiterated the opposition's position that the nation's human rights situation should be addressed by the MCC, and pointed to a recent attempt by authorities to put a lean against her personal property, to recover court costs associated with a legal case her party recently lost, as an example of an intimidation campaign against opposition leaders.

More Questions Than Answers

18. (SBU) COMMENT: The reports outlined above concerning the treatment of three Basotho asylees by South African authorities are not yet officially confirmed, and the lack of information from the South African High Commission in Maseru and the GOL's Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions is perplexing. When asked about the seeming contradictions between the RSA's apparent grant of asylum to these six men followed by their alleged rough treatment and subsequent arrest, the South African Deputy High Commissioner could only confirm that it was odd but that he "wouldn't rule it out." END COMMENT.
MURPHY